



News From

JACK DOYLE

MONROE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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MONROE COUNTY UNVEILS YOUTH SMOKING CESSATION CAMPAIGN

Monroe County Executive Jack Doyle today launched a major new initiative to reduce youth smoking by encouraging the 35 percent of the county's teenagers who smoke to quit.

The project, known by its Web site address "GottaQuit.com", is among the first in the nation to utilize Internet Instant Messaging technology to connect youth smokers to young adults who have smoked and quit.

"Our research shows us that teenagers who smoke want to quit, but they don't know how to get help," said Doyle. "We hope the media campaign, coupled with the Web site assistance, will create a cultural shift for teenagers that will allow them to think about kicking their smoking habits now."

"GottaQuit.com" was introduced at a news conference in Rochester this morning. The initiative was developed to assist nicotine-addicted kids in the 14-18 age group to quit by using the tools on a highly interactive Web site.

A variety of media, including television, radio, billboards, bus cards and direct mail, are designed to drive traffic to the Web site, where teens will be educated about tobacco use, entertained, and allowed to compete for free merchandise.

A key element of the site is a section called "Talk To Us. Live." where teens will be able to connect with a trained quit coach with just two clicks of the mouse.

The quit coaches will be housed at the University of Rochester Medical Center and staffed by the Smoking Research Program. Monroe County and the University announced a partnership effort in this project last spring.

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The Web site features "Human Click" software which allows teenagers the ability to Instant Message a counselor during hours when kids are most likely to be tempted to have a cigarette. The user can build rapport with counselors by returning to talk with the same person.

Many educational and entertaining sections are also displayed on the Web site including a personal quitting calendar called, "Countdown to Quit." Here users log in a date to quit smoking and receive daily emails encouraging them to maintain strong through the initial 10 days of cessation.

The GottaQuit.com "Talk To Us. Live" coaching center will operate Monday through Friday, 3:00 p.m. to 10:30 p.m. Weekend hours will be added once demand is established. There is no fee for Monroe County residents, however they must be between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age to receive assistance.

"Three-quarters of adolescents want to stop smoking, but until now there have been few resources specifically designed for them," said Deborah Ossip-Klein, Ph.D., Research Associate Professor and Director, Smoking Research Program at the University of Rochester's James P. Wilmot Cancer Center. "This program is one of the first of its kind in the United States and will establish the standards by which all cessation campaigns will be measured."

Television commercials feature real kids from Monroe County who have either quit smoking or are engaged in the struggle to quit smoking. Young smokers will be able to relate to these kids and their struggle to quit.

Other sections of the Web site are: Quitting 101, Smoking 101, Smoke Filled Fables, Top 10 List, Do the Math, Subliminal Sam and a Win Free Stuff area.

More than 3,400 teenagers in the United States begin smoking each day. Formative research conducted for the county by the University of Rochester Cancer Center and Children's Hospital at Strong revealed that kids want their smoking addiction to be taken seriously.

"Adolescents use the Internet, and may seek health information there. This project will help young people quit more effectively," said Jonathan Klein, M.D., M.P.H. Associate Professor of Pediatrics and of Community and Preventive Medicine at Children's Hospital at Strong, who is evaluating the project.

GottaQuit.com is funded through a portion of the Master Tobacco Settlement Agreement.

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